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Pentagon 'Doctored' Of Data Is Charged

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Senate investigators charged yesterday that they were given "doctored" versions of Pentagon messages about negotiations with Spain in 1969, in an attempt to conceal information from them.

Copies of Telex messages from the Joint Chiefs of Staff were "altered," it said, "to delete references to other JCS messages" withheld from Senate probers. After a challenge by the Senate investigators, they said, the deleted material and other documents mentioned in the altered texts were supplied by Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird.

The incident was cited as an example of devious barriers encountered by the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on U.S. commitments abroad, headed by Stuart Symington (D-Mo.)

A heavily-censored version of the subcommittee's long-delayed report of Spain and Portugal was the last in a series of 11 transcripts of investigations to be made public, although the hearings began with Spain, on March 11, 1969.

5-Year Agreement Signed

Over protests of many members of the full committee, the Nixon administration and Spain on Aug. 6, 1970, signed a five-year executive agreement extending U.S. use of air bases in Spain and the Polaris submarine base at Rota.

Senate critics protested that the agreement amounted to "a de facto military treaty" that should have been put to a Senate vote. The administration maintained that it contained no U.S. security commitment requiring treaty handling. But the accord did give Spain a back-door link to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The current transcript puts some light on an intense controversy of 1969: whether the Defense Department's negotiator with Spain, Air Force Gen. David Burchinal, deputy U.S. commander in Europe, exceeded his instructions and made new U.S. defense pledges to Spain.

Also disclosed in the hearings is a 1953 letter showing that the Senate leadership that year literally surrendered authority to the President to make the initial U.S. base agreement with Spain.

That letter, from then Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to Senate Republican Leader William F. Knowland (Calif.) stated that the Senate leadership privately expressed the view "that such agreements could be concluded by the President without additional legislation..."

The opening of 1969 negotiations with Spain by military talks, the record shows, was "the idea of Secretary (Dean) Rusk" at the close of the Johnson administration.

Rusk hoped U.S. military negotiators could talk Spain out of exorbitant bargaining demands—deleted from the transcript, but elsewhere reported to have been, at the outset, a request for \$1.2 billion worth of U.S. weapons over a five-year period.

Committee Chairman J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.) has said that what Spain has received amounts to about \$400 million over five years. The Symington subcommittee claims that Spain derives "at least as much benefit from this presence of U.S. military in Spain as the United States receives from its right to use the bases..." but yet the United States pays "hundreds of millions of dollars to Spain.

Begun by Wheeler

Talks were launched in Madrid by Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who subsequently delegated the task to Gen. Burchinal.

Wheeler was quoted as telling his Spanish counterparts that "We believe that the conditions of the cold war are no less demanding today than in 1953 and 1963," and also that: "By the presence of U.S. forces in Spain, the U.S. gives Spain a far more visible and credible security guarantee than any written document."

All references to the specific cause of the flareup over Burchinal's subsequent negotiations, however, were deleted from the current transcript by the Nixon administration.

It is known from other reports that Burchinal, in agreeing to what could be considered a threat to Spain's security, referred to possibilities of limited war in North Africa, possible Algerian aggression or proxy war in Spain's African colonies backed by the Soviet Union.

Strategists Dismayed

The risk of signing a pledge of U.S. involvement in Spanish colonial warfare dismayed U.S. strategists.

Elliot L. Richardson, then Under Secretary of State, told the Symington subcommittee that when it was found the transcripts of the military-level minutes could not be readily amended, it was decided they should be "neutralized." Language was added stating that the views expressed in the minutes "are not necessarily the views of the governments of Spain and the United States nor do they imply intergovernmental understandings or commitments..."

The episode about the altering of documents concerned instructions sent to Burchinal.

Symington, on March 13, 1969, wrote Gen. Wheeler requesting "all negotiation directives and guidelines" to Burchinal. Wheeler replied he had no authority to reveal them; Symington then addressed his request to Secretary Laird and Secretary of State William P. Rogers.

The subcommittee transcript shows:

"April 2.—Sen. Symington and subcommittee staff were permitted to see six Telexes and certain correspondence among Secretary Rusk, Deputy (Defense) Secretary Nitze and Gen. Wheeler. The nature of two of the telexes (typed instead of real copies) suggested they might not be complete. Assistant Secretary of State Macomber was asked to determine if these copies had been altered. He found that they had been changed to delete references to other JCS messages pertinent to the original request by Sen. Symington for all directives."

Next day, on April 3, the record states, the subcommittee was permitted to see "the complete versions of the Telexes" and on April 11, "Defense provided about 15 new documents..."

Even after the negotiating records were amended, committee chairman Fulbright charged that the United States was granting "the equivalent an extension of NATO" to "one of the oldest and most entrenched dictatorships in the world today."